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Journalist acquitted by Rome court

ROME (UPI) — A court acquitted U.S. journalist Claire Sterling yesterday of charges she revealed judicial secrets in a New York Times article about the "Bulgarian connection" in the 1981 attempt on Pope John Paul II's life.

She won full acquittal both on the secrets charge and a lesser charge of abetting the legal official who apparently gave her the information on which she based her article.

The case stemmed from a June 10, 1984, article in The New York Times quoting excerpts from a report by Assistant Public Prosecutor Antonio Albano to authorities investigating the May 13, 1981, shooting and wounding of the pope in St. Peter's Square.

In the report, Mr. Albano recommended the indictment of Sergei Antonov, former Rome station chief of the Bulgarian airline Balkan Air, and two Bulgarian diplomats. His

recommendation was based on alleged complicity in the attack on the pope by Turkish terrorist Mehmet Ali Agca.

Defense lawyer Pietro Moscato argued successfully that it was never proved that Miss Sterling obtained a copy of Mr. Albano's document from judiciary offices and that she could have received excerpts from other sources.

Miss Sterling previously had published a book based on the theory that Mr. Antonov and other Bulgarians helped Agca and his Turkish friends to try to kill the pope on orders from the Soviet KGB secret police.

On March 29, after a 10-month trial, a Rome court, citing insufficient proof, acquitted Mr. Antonov, 38, and Bulgarian diplomats Todor Aivazov, 42, and Zhelio Vassilev, 43, of implication in a plot to kill the pope.

Only Mr. Antonov, who was arrested in Rome Nov. 25, 1982, attended the trial. He was allowed to return to Bulgaria after the verdict. Mr. Aivazov and Mr. Vassilev, who were stationed in the Bulgarian Embassy in Rome at the time of the shooting, returned to Bulgaria before Mr. Antonov was arrested.